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AUTHOR Thompson, Mark E.
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ABSTRACT

In the United States, the illiterate or functionally illiterate population has been estimated at somewhere between 7 and 73 million people. This range is primarily due to variables such as definitions of literacy, methods of survey research, and the researcher's unique perspective. Literacy is traditionally defined using some criteria relating to the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and calculating, and typically includes less quantifiable skills such as a higher level thought process (e.g. thinking, problem solving, and ability to discourse on topics related to history, government, social issues, and science). Within each definition of literacy, different assumptions are being made. For example, in the twentieth century, the acquisition of intellectual skills is implied within the basic definitions of literacy (reading and writing). One implication from reports that attempt to measure literacy is that literacy definitions cannot account for variations in skills needed to function at different levels of society. The wide variety of literacy definitions developed throughout the years demonstrate that literacy may be a relative state, dependent upon differing views about literacy's social purposes and values. Beyond knowing the basics of literacy, there is an unknown process within each individual that works to promote self-development, inquiry, and openness of expression. (One hundred and twenty-two footnotes are included.) (MM)

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Please send all correspondence to:

Mark E. Thompson
19153 Roman Way
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879

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The Literacy Image:

Assumptions and Implications

by

Mark E. Thompson

Financial Analyst

Treasury Department

Washington, D.C.

presented to the

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The Literacy Image:
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Abstract

This paper attempts to explain some of the disorder that is related to defining literacy. Numerous definitions from the scholarly literature are presented to demonstrate diversity and range of approaches. For several reasons special emphasis is given to reading as a significant factor of literacy. Organization for this paper is divided into these topics: introduction, assumptions, implications, and summary. A detailed review of the scholarly literature has been undertaken to help identify salient contributions and trends in thinking or approaching literacy.

The Literacy Image: Assumptions and Implications

What we know regarding the concept of literacy is usually based on certain fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and maybe doing calculations. Educators and other influential groups in a society will define literacy using some criteria relating to these basic skills and perhaps include less quantifiable skills such as a higher level thought process (e.g., thinking, problem solving, and being able to discourse on topics related to history, government, social issues, and science). Approaches to literacy are sometimes based on narrow political and economic factors rather than fulfillment of universal human potential. Many points of view can be found.

Mao Tse-tung while explaining his revolution said, "...the rulers of that time...were old and experienced. They had more learning but we had more truth."[1] Mao was quite literate and knew much of the outside world through his books. "No other world leader of midcentury -- not even deGaulle -- read for himself and wrote his own talks to the extent Mao did."[2] Lewis Mumford, the famous American writer, said with a biting tone that "If the business of education was to turn out people without imagination, without desire, without capacity for choice, without initiative or will..."[3] then our present educational environment was well conceived. Alfred North Whitehead, the brilliant philosopher, mathematician, and educator, said, "There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations."[4] Whitehead also firmly stated that "In no part of

education can you do without discipline or can you do without freedom..."[5]

Most literate people have been exposed to some form of an educational process. In well developed societies formal schooling is expected. Underdeveloped cultures may depend on informal experiences like hunting or tracking to be the basis of a limited social and educational process. Being literate may depend on specific references within a defined culture. Well-to-do citizens from this country who might travel to Australia and then roam with Australian aborigines will probably be exposed to their lack of skills (i.e., education) needed to survive in an alien culture. This comparison where cultures are contrasted, puts considerable strain on efforts to define literacy.

Traditionally one essential skill required of literate people is the ability to read or communicate in some higher order. Reading helps to stimulate one's perspective, and it informs.[6] The popular Dr. Seuss of children's literature has something to say about reading:

> The more that you read,
> the more things you will know.
> The more that you learn
> the more places you'll go...
>
> If you read with your eyes shut
> you're likely to find
> that the place where you're going
> is far, far behind.[7]

For those without access to a formal education or otherwise have not acquired the skills needed to become literate, then economic,

political, and social restrictions are inevitable.[8] Langston Hughes, the dynamic black poet, has written a short, compelling poem that draws attention to the unique state of deprivation handed to blacks. The title is "American Heartbreak."

I am the American heartbreak --
Rock on which Freedom
Stumps its toe --
The great mistake
That Jamestown
Made long ago.[9]

Educators as well as other professionals are entrusted to understand the potential that individuals represent, and they are frequently able to promote literacy in various ways. Cultivating Life in all its manifestations is a task without end. One of America's influential political thinkers, Walter Lippmann, developed this thought in another way: "The acquired culture is not transmitted in our genes, and so the issue is always in doubt. The good life in the good society, though attainable, is never attained and possessed once and for all."[10]

William Blake, the thoughtful poet who wrote about the human condition, identifies individual potential in one of his poems called "The Human Abstract." Here is the last stanza:

The Gods of the earth and sea
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree;
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the Human Brain.[11]

Regardless of potential, individuals need training in the

essentials of literacy in order to function well. This is especially true in technically advanced societies, but it is also important in developing ~~or~~ primitive societies. Formal schools uusually function to make students literate in the ways of a defined society. Indeed one will be far, far behind if the basics of literacy training (or education) are not mastered. Paul Cooperman, an educator, argues that the primary function of schools is to teach basic literacy -- a body of knowledge that includes: reading, writing, computing, spelling, and basic knowledge of history, government, geography, science, and literature.[12] This is the traditional approach to literacy.

Introduction

In this country the illiterate or functionally illiterate population has been estimated at somewhere between seven and 73 million people.[13] This astonishing range is primarily due to variables such as: definitions of literacy, method of survey research, and the researcher's unique perspective. World literacy figures are also subject to the same elastic variables. In the early 1980s it was estimated that 850 million adults (defined as age 15 and above) in the world were illiterate. Ninety-six percent of this figure live in Third World countries. In Africa well over 60 percent of the population is illiterate, and in Asia over 50 percent are illiterate. Between 35 and 50 percent of the world's adult population is thought to be illiterate.[14] In 1951 UNESCO's Expert Committee on the Standardization of Educational Statistics proposed that "A person is literate who can with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his everyday life."[15] A more recent UNESCO position (1970) contends that four years of primary schooling is a minimum requirement to

attain permanent literacy.[16] In terms of a world literacy rating, the United States ranks 49th among 158 member nations of the United Nations. Western European countries and Japan are ranked higher than the United States. Switzerland and Israel are given credit for being the most literate societies on earth.[17]

In this country there are a host of academic disciplians working to define, study or explain literacy in some way: educators, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, political scientists, and English professors are involved. Also Federal, state, and local governments are engaged in analyzing literacy. With such a popular topic, it is not difficult to find numerous scholarly papers and public commentary on literacy. What greatly confuses the literacy issue is a lack of concensus on definitions. Sylvia Scribner, a psychologist, starts off her scholarly article on literacy by stating: "Although literacy is a problem of pressing national concern, we have yet to discover or set its boundaries."[18] Scribner's article, "Literacy in Three Metaphors" (1984), cuts to a basic problem: "We may lack consensus on how best to define literacy because we have differing views about literacy's social purposes and values."[19] Her three metaphors are: literacy as adaption, literacy as power, and literacy as a state of grace.[20]

> Literacy as Adaption - "The functional approach has been hailed as a major advance over more traditional concepts of reading and writing because it takes into account the goals and settings of people's activities with written language."[21]

Literacy as Power -- It remains to be established that literacy per se mobilizes people for action to change their social reality.

Literacy as a State of Grace -- There is a tendency in many societies to endow the literate person with special virtues.[22]

There has probably been more attention given to literacy (i.e., the concept of literacy) in the 1980s, for various reasons, than in any decade of the twentieth century. In the years prior to World War I elite institutions of higher education, such as Harvard, took the lead in defining literate behavior. Harvard's college of English sponsored two conferences in this period (1896 and 1916) to review English instruction in secondary schools and colleges. Writing ability and the study of literacy works, the classics, were stressed. The dominant educational philosophy that emerged was the assumption that good reading and good language use resulted in good thinking.[23]

After World War I more attention was given to mass education in this country. American entry into the war alerted educators to deficits in reading instruction.* Paul Johnson, a prominent scholar from England, said the 1920s was the most fortunate decade in American history.[24] "Between 1910 and 1930 total educational spending rose fourfold, from $426.25 million to $2.3 billion; higher

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*Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick's article "The Nature of Literacy: An Historical Exploration" has an excellent treatment of WW I Army intelligence testing. Harvard Educational Review, 47 (3) August 1977, pp. 370-85.

education spending increased fourfold too, to nearly one billion a year."[25] The Book of the Month Club and the Literary Guild were started during the Jazz Age, and by 1930 there were 35,000 youth orchestras. Cultural stimulation flourished. The decade introduced: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, William Faulkner, Upton Sinclair, Thomas Wolf, Eugene O'Neill, and Thornton Wilder.[26]

When the Great Depression hit with jolting force in the 1930s, there was a regrettable sag in educational activity. "By 1933 the U.S. Office of Education estimated that 1,500 higher education colleges had gone bankrupt or shut their doors and university enrollments fell by a quarter-million."[27] Total book sales fell 50 percent from the 1920s. John Steinbeck complained: "When people are broke, the first things they give up are books."[28]

World War II helped to put our country back to work, and as a result, we emerged as the most powerful industrial nation on earth. Technology with the resulting growth in industry created a serious demand for better educated or literate employees. In the 1950s an expansion of educational facilities occurred across this country, and in the late 50s and early 60s higher education in particular experienced an extraordinary boom. Access to higher education became more liberal, World War II offspring (baby boomers) were ready for college, and numerous two-year colleges (junior college or community college) were being constructed in all 50 states.

During the decade of the turbulent 60s there was a general questioning and reexamination of institutions, concepts, values, and

relationships. Literacy as a concept did not escape the searching restlessness that characterized the 60s. Demands were made for a fair and responsive educational system. Often these demands were undefined. Being literate can open doors to employment, but there are no quick cures. The Federal government stimulated literacy programs in the 60s through grants and specialized commissions. This activity continued into the 1970s. During the 1980s concern for literacy problems have been translated into dollars and cents through predicted labor shortages. These shortages are estimated to cost industry $25 billion a year. In 1980, 30.3 million 18 to 24 year olds were estimated as the primary entrants into the labor market. By 1990 this number is expected to shrink to approximately 25.8 million, a 15% decrease. As this occurs, the new 1990 labor force will contain a greater proportion of minorities (people with less educational preparation as compared to middle class Caucasians).[29] At this time (summer 1988) there is already a severe labor shortage in some urban areas. Washington, D.C. and the surrounding metropolitan area, as an example, are experiencing labor shortages in service jobs, construction, and specialized white collar positions.

The prediction of a national labor shortage has motivated the Federal government and business leaders to study literacy with unusual concern. President Ronald Reagan has been active in promoting the literacy effort in a fashion. On September 7, 1983, representatives of volunteer organizations were invited to the East Room of the White House. President Reagan told this group: "Let us today to resolve to roll-up our sleeves and get to work. Across

this land let those who can read teach those who cannot."[30] The only money mentioned was $300 million more in the budget for work-study students to help in adult literacy programs. Although this effort does not represent a massive assault on illiteracy, it is perhaps a small step in the right direction.

From the 1950s and into the 1980s there has been a tendency to define literacy in less restricted terms.[31] A recent report by the 1986 National Assessment of Educational Progress, funded by the Federal government and written by Irwin S. Kirsch and Ann Jungeblut, states that literacy is conceptualized as a set of contextualized processes or practices rather than a standard.[32] Their official definition of literacy is: "Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." Maxine Greene, the well-known philosopher of education, believes: literacy, liberal education, higher learning, and similar terms should not be conceived as fixed ideas or dissociated from the conversation of both scholars and ordinary people.[33]

Less structured definitions of literacy allow subjective notions, such as creativity, thinking, problem solving, and initiatives, to be included. Under a more open concept of literacy, creative artists from numerous mediums are encouraged to incorporate their talent as a part of developing knowledge and potential. Also people occupying mundane positions in life are given credit for their non-worldly wisdom. Robert Frost, one of our most famous poets, makes reference to non-worldly wisdoms in the fifth stanza of "Wisdom of this World":

Some have relied on what they knew,
Others on being simply true.
What worked for them might work for you.[34]

Assumptions

Within each definition of literacy, and there are numerous articles that define and classify literacy, some assumptions are being made. In the nineteenth century, the ability to write one's name satisfied the definition of a literate person. Historians can search records of that period, such as deeds, marriage licenses, and hotel registers, to determine who was literate.[35] At that time there was not a pressing demand in the agarian labor market for literate employees. People learned their trade in most cases through apprenticeship. Blacksmiths, cobblers, ranchers, seamstresses, and farmers became knowledgeable by working their way up in that profession. "In 1920, for every person working in manufacturing and distribution there were six people engaged in agriculture..."[36] No extravagant assumptions about literacy were being made in the nineteenth century. Census surveys in 1840 simply asked individuals if they could read or write. A "yes" answer classified that person as literate.[37]

Into the twentieth century, literacy started to take on more sophistication. The acquisition of intellectual skills was implied within the basic definition of literacy (reading and writing). Elitist schools stressed classical studies. John T. Guthrie and Irwin S. Kirsch, reading specialists, find that reading to gain information did not become a primary interest until the twentieth century. They believe social expectations, the environment, and reading

activities others may expect are crucial in determining if a person is literate.[38] One of the most frequently cited literacy articles* of the 1980s, "Literacy: Trends and Explanations" by Jeanne S. Chall, made this disquieting remark at the start of her presentation: "For almost every statement on literacy, you can find another that directly opposes it, from the status of literacy -- what it is today and whether it is getting better or worse, to how and why we got there."[39] This candid remark indicates there is a serious problem in getting a consensus on the definition of literacy. One person's assumptions about literacy apparently can prevail to distort another's assumptions. Chall believes that during the 1970s there was less doubt and more optimism expressed about literacy; she cites growth in professional associations, research, and the number of articles in scholarly journals on reading and writing.[40] Carl F. Kaestle, an excellent literacy historian, finds that "Not only the explanations but even the basic facts about literacy trends are uncertain."[41]

Norwell Northcutt's 1974 Adult Performance Level (APL) Study is perhaps one of the most widely cited efforts of its type according to Guthrie and Kirsch.[42] This study attempted to define literacy competency by considering: level of education, level of income, and status of occupation. Northcutt defines literacy as a relative construct which is meaningful only in a specific cultural contex. This means literacy is bound to the technological state of a particular

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*Chall presented this article to the American Educational Research Association in 1983. It appeared in the Educational Researcher in November 1983; then it appeared in American Education in November 1984. It is also in the ERIC system. This exposure along with an excellent presentation of facts have quickly made it a significant scholarly publication.

culture, so that a person can be literate in one culture and illiterate in another.[43] From a 1967 article, Alex Inkeles argues that literacy opens the mind to new ideas not dependent on the immediate social situation. Therefore a literate person is quicker to perceive social change and can more easily redefine beliefs to fit new demands.[44]

In 1972 Manfred Stanley, a sociologist, wrote a scholarly article on literacy titled, "Literacy: The Crisis of a Convential Wisdom." This article identified the problem of whether to accept a strict technical definition of literacy or accept "...a systematic larger view of what literacy really is in itself."[45] Stanley said the Army's World War II definition of literacy is probably the starkest technical definition he can find. It said literates were persons who were capable of understanding the kinds of written instructions needed for carrying out basic military functions or tasks.[46] Stanley finds the liberal definitions of literacy a no-man's-land: "...there is no place to stand."[47]

In another scholarly article from the 1970s, Thomas J. Farrel presents: "Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz" (1977). Farrel, an English professor, assumes "...that reading and writing are instrumental in increasing conceptual abilities and awareness."[48] According to Farrel, "...cognitive restructurings caused by reading and writing develop the higher reasoning processes involved in extended abstract thinking."[49] For Thomas Farrel reading and writing are the basics of a literacy program. During the '70s a "back to basics" movement was in vogue in education, and Farrel's article makes a contribution toward that particular thrust.

Also from 1977 comes an interesting historical approach to

literacy by Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick. They review selected European and American models of literacy and find that "... reading instruction has been aimed at attaining either a low level of literacy for a large number of people or a high level of an elite."[50] The Resnicks are not supportive of a "back to basics" theme. "The old tried and true approaches, which nostalgia prompts us to believe might solve current problems were designed neither to achieve the literacy standard sought today nor to assure successful literacy for everyone."[51]

In 1970 David Harman, a scholar who was building a reputation as an expert on adult literacy, wrote, "Illiteracy: An Overview." He said, "Literacy efforts cannot be prescriptive designs adaptable to all countries and areas. Rather, they should be designed for specific situations and target populations, with clearly articulated aims."[52] Five years later (1975) Harman and Carman St. John Hunter published one of the most comprehensive studies on illiteracy in the United States. Their central recommendation was to establish community based initiatives to serve disadvantaged segments of our population.[53] A year later (1976) Robert L. Hillerick published "Toward An Assessable Definition of Literacy", and he said the term literate has no universally accepted definition.[54] Hillerick rejects typical grade standard definitions of literacy and purely job related functional definitions. He recognizes literacy as a continuum and comes up with a rather loose definition: "The individual's level of literacy is appropriate if, for his age, he can function effectively and independently in his society and if he retains a capability for movement in that society."[55]

After reviewing numerous definitions of literacy and institutional goals, such as UNESCO's mission to eradicate illiteracy in the world

before the year 2000, Shirley Brice Heath ("The Functions and Uses of Literacy", 1980) finds confusion and a lack of understanding. At the conclusion of her literacy article she has this to say, "In short, literacy has different meanings for members of different groups, with a variety of acquisition modes, functions, and uses; these differences have yet to be taken into account by policy-makers."[56] However, any policy-making organization, Federal, state or local governments, will have the same problems that scholars have in selecting definitions and approving a means to succeed. In fact policy-makers have further complications due to limited public resources and political factions fighting each other for recognition. Understanding the nuances of literacy will not by itself solve policy problems, but it could help in mobilizing public support for literacy programs.

The 1980s have already produced numerous literacy articles, reports, and papers that attempt to define literacy. Beth Daniell has written an interesting paper titled "Toward a Definition of Literacy."[57] She reviews the scholarly literature and presents an excellent bibliography with 62 references. Also there are seven major literacy topics identified with references for each. Daniell does not present her own assumptions concerning literacy, but she does say what literacy is not:

1. Literacy is distinct from mastery of the standard dialect.

2. Literacy is not schooling. Daniell makes reference to Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's research of the Vai people of Liberia indicating literacy can be acquired without schooling.[58]

3. Literacy and abstract thinking (cognition) are not as close as some believe.

4. Reading may not be only an act of cognition. In some cultures reading may be one of the ways individuals play different roles offered to them by their society.

5. Literacy should not be equated with culture.[59]

After making reference to historical studies on literacy, Daniell said, "...a definition of literacy not only depends on the expectations of a specific culture but also varies across cultures and across time within cultures."[60] She closes by saying that searching through relationships of human beings and their cultures is needed to move toward a definition of literacy.[61]

A most interesting, straightforward study was accomplished by Ruth Sander in 1982. Titled: "Comparison of Literacy Campaigns in Socialistic and Democratic Countries," Sander reviews published literature on mass literacy campaigns and presents an analysis.[62] Ten countries were selected, five socialistic and five democratic governments. They were paired based on population, size or geographical proximity. The comparisons were: Russia - Brazil, China - India, Nicaragua - Guatemala, Tanzania - Ecuador, and Cuba* - Venezuela. Literacy campaigns in socialistic countries are more successful than campaigns in democratic countries according to Sander. Also more mass literacy campaigns have been conducted in socialistic countries. One

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*One of Fidel Castro's first major undertakings after the 1959 revolution was to institute an island-wide crash literacy campaign. Fidel by Tad Szuk (New York: Avon, 1986).

of the difficulties of this study was finding enough democratic countries that had even attempted a mass literacy campaign. Sander suggests that administrative instability within democratic countries may be a significant problem that inhibits a mass literacy campaign.[63]

From what Judith A. Langer calls the sociocognitive perspective on literacy, an agreement is made to view literacy as a culturally based way of thinking rather than a simple act of reading and writing.[64] Langer's 1986 article attempts to demonstrate that many scholars and the general public have a narrow perspective of literacy (i.e., to read and write at some minimal level), and this circumstance restrains solutions to issues of literacy learning, to include policy and planning. After reviewing numerous definitions of literacy, Langer concludes that "...the focus has remained solely on the uses of reading and writing."[65] Langer suggests the ability to think and reason are significant factors that should be within the definition of literacy, and these concepts should be given more attention. The assumption that an expanded definition of literacy will help with policy and planning of literacy programs is an interesting assertion, but there is no supporting data. Langer does supply an adequate bibliography to support this paper.

Charles Suhor's 1987 approach to literacy, "Understanding Literacy -- An Overview," is a concise scholarly presentation with a good bibliography.[66] Suhor, makes this important point: "A nation dedicated to mass education cannot be satisfied with half-hearted attempts at universal literacy."[67] He believes higher order prose skills such as interpreting texts should be stressed. At the conclusion he presents

a literacy chart indicating how preliterate cultures, literate cultures, and multiliterate cultures functioned on seven variables (language, education, work, et al.).[68]

As a continuation of his interest in the history of literacy, Daniel P. Resnick edited eight papers which were presented at the "Literacy in Historical Perspective" conference sponsored by the Federal government (published in 1983).[69] Historians, educators, anthropologists, and government officials attended the conference. The last chapter titled: "Readings on Literacy: A Bibliographical Essay" by Tela Zasloff is quite well done and interesting.[70] Ortega Y Gasset is mentioned by Zasloff. To read, said Y Gasset, "... implies understanding a text fully, but this is impossible and utopian since we always read our own interpretation into a text."[71] Y Gasset develops two axioms: "...every utterance is deficient, saying less than it wishes to: every utterance is exuberant, saying more than it plans."[72] Marshall McLuhan is also quoted and discussed. McLuhan said that we are "...confronting an electric technology which would seem to render individualism obsolete."[73] In a review of Anderson and Bowman's (editors) book, Education and Economic Development, Zasloff identifies an unexpected conclusion made by Bowman: from a historical comparison of literacy levels, about 40 percent adult literacy level is the necessary threshold for economic development.[74] Frank Laubach's work is reviewed. Lauback has taught literacy in 96 countries and 274 languages during 25 years of work. His methods are based on the missionary tradition and may now seem simplistic (and the claims extravagant).[75] Mark Blaug's "Literacy and Economic Development" article is mentioned. Blaug concludes that the most

we can say about the economic benefits of literacy is that "...while literacy may not always cure poverty, affluence always eradicates illiteracy."[76]

In 1985 the National Institute of Education sponsored a study titled "Adult Literacy and Technology" written by Raymond S. Nickerson.[77] A large well researched bibliography of 91 references is provided. Here are some of the points made by Nickerson:

1. According to a 1979 White House Conference on Library and Information Sciences, the literacy rate of the United States is lower than that of Western European nations and the Soviet Union.

2. Those who lack basic reading and writing skills accounted for about 75 percent of the unemployed.[78]

3. Reading is the primary means used to acquire knowledge.

4. More effective approaches to the teaching of literacy are needed.

5. In recent years an emphasis on higher order cognitive skills in reading and writing has expanded the definition of literacy.

6. A national guide to literacy facilities and services published by the Contract Literacy Center lists 39 national literacy programs and several thousand state level resources.[79]

7. Recommendations for the use of technology with literacy

enhancement are made pertaining to these topics: principles and perspective, research, development, service delivery, and evaluation.[80]

Other diversified views on literacy from the 1980s include these nine papers and articles:

1. Harry Wagschal's "Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century" (1982) argues that traditional literacy standards are obsolete.[81] "It is conceivable that a redefinition of literacy in the future include literacy of the senses, cultural literacy (knowledge of 'self' in relationship to social organization) and philosophic and anthropological literacy, knowledge of alternative epistemologies and paradims, lateral or divergent thinking."[82] Reading and writing might become tools for small groups (academics, journalists, etc.) while the masses communicate orally and receive their information from television and radio.[83]

2. Kenneth Goodman's "On Being Literate in an Age of Information" (1985) is a concise, well-written article. Goodman takes the position that the ultimate achievement of literacy is breath of its functions and use of written language by all people.[84] He also states education for literacy has been rooted in a narrow, elitist view of literacy. "Literacy development must be socially rooted. It must take into account the values, cultural experiences, life opportunities, and

access to functions requiring literacy."[85]

3. Karla Smart's "Literacy: A Reflection" (1985) defines literacy as an invisible, measureless phenomenon.[86] This presentation puts some strain on the reader to determine how literacy is being defined. Smart's rhetoric is smooth but lacks focus: "In the fullness of being literate there is humanness -- wakefulness, liveliness and engagement."[87]

4. H. S. Bhola's "Literacy: Destiny of the Human Species" (1985) says there is a social necessity to read and write.[88] He said without literacy, worker citizens are confined to the lowest rungs of the economy and are consigned to the underclass.[89]

5. Ruth J. Kurth's "Literacy: The Myth and the Challenge" (1986) makes reference to a literacy crisis that developed during the past decade.[90] But Kurth claims Americans have not emerged as less literate than generations before; society's demand for high level literacy has increased.

6. Paul V. Delker's "Beyond Literacy in an Uncertain World" (1986) says literacy includes more than reading. It encompasses: writing, speaking, listening, computing, and problem solving skills.[91] Delker also claims literacy in an "uncertain world" should include: discernment, reflection, risk taking, and being open to

new perspectives.

7. Joseph John Comprone's "The Meaning of Literacy in a Culture of Writing and Reading" (1986) states that literacy is more than a mechanical ability to read and write; it's the ability to understand what is read and to write what is understood.[92] For Comprone literacy lies somewhere between being a function and being defined as power.

8. Beth Daniell's "The Uses of Literacy Theory: The Great Leap and the Rhetoric of Retreat" (1987) recalls that: Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, and Walter Ong define literacy as a Great Leap in human cognition.[93] The Great Leap Theory, according to Daniell, claims that literacy itself causes a great leap in human cognition.

9. Sylvia Read Taber's "Current Definitions of Literacy" (1987) reviews relative and absolute definitions of literacy.[94] This is a tightly written, well-organized article. Relative definitions of literacy account for changing needs of individuals and changing needs of a technical society then they attempt to measure an individual's ability to function. Absolute definitions of literacy include: years of schooling, achievement on standardized or criterion referenced tests or a defined set of competencies (such as reading a short paragraph and answering question). Taber notes that

relative definitions are theoretically more satisfying but virtually unmanageable for the researcher.[95]

Implications

It is not clear how one concept of literacy can be applied and at the same time satisfy numerous definitions or approaches that have been suggested in the scholarly literature. This problem seems to boil down to a situation where competing definitions of literacy strive for superiority. Public acceptance is solicited. Maxine Greene and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., represent two quite different approaches to literacy and both have strong followings.

E. D. Hirsch's views have received considerable public attention through his 1987 book, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know.[96] This book is a condensation of Hirsch's thinking on literacy going back at least to 1983 when he published "Cultural Literacy" in the American Scholar.[97] In his 1983 article Hirsch said the national decline in our literacy is well documented by the decline of verbal SAT scores. This might be considered a narrow, somewhat elitist view since a small number of our citizens ever participate in the SAT program. Hirsch defined cultural literacy as shared, canonical knowledge that is inherently necessary to a literate democracy.[98]

Hirsch's popular book probably fills a vacuum for many citizens by identifying cultural literacy with over 4,000 words, proper names, and dates. Hirsch presents cultural literacy in a trim package: "...guideposts that can be of practical use to teachers, students, and all others who need to know our literate culture."[99] But many

words and names on Hirsch's list will give competent professionals a reason for questioning Hirsch's neat sounding academic approach. As an example: acrophobia, alliteration, Archimedes, George Bizet, Emily Brontë, cambium, Delphic oracle, and Milton Friedman are samples of Hirsch's guideposts for literacy.[100] However, many citizens who consider themselves literate and quite successful will scoff at Hirsch's list as being too bookish. An auto mechanic, a florist or a heavy equipment operator will likely have a vocabularly based on their professional experience. Are they to be classified as illiterate, because their vocabularly is not up to Hirsch's definition? The term Delphic oracle along with other such terms, words, and dates selected by Hirsch do not necessarily represent shared, canonical knowledge inherently necessary to a literate democracy. This type of approach, while worthy, may be overstated by Hirsch.

James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, used people from debtors' prision to establish Savannah. Our entire population represents mixed cultural backgrounds. These cultures have their own proud heritage to protect. Immigrants coming to this country had little sense of a new cultural literacy requirement, because their presence represented America's strength, diversity and tolerance.

Maxine Greene does not see the world of literacy as E. D. Hirsch does.[101] She believes the term cultural literacy should not be conceived as a single, fixed idea. Greene indicates there are numerous reports of decline which lament in one way or other the diminished understanding of science, history, and civilization generally.[102] According to Greene, these dire reports respond to the economically ambitious and insecure: "the desire to 'buy' from colleges and

universities what they need vocationally or professionally to get ahead in the world."[103] Greene contends that once knowledge is translated into discreet bits of information, then texts no longer challenge people to go in search of meanings. The Scarlet Letter or a biography of Helen Keller can be taught in a closed, severe manner. Greene fears that focusing on a particular definition of cultural literacy, as Hirsch does with his lists of words, will specialize literacy and in the process restrict inquiry or openness of expression. H. L. Menken comes close to Maxine Greene's perspective when he said, "The truly civilized man is always skeptical and tolerant...His culture is based on 'I am not too sure!'"[104]

Implications from government sponsored literacy studies are frequently open to challenge and debate. As an example, the National Assessment of Educational Progess completed a literacy study of young adults aged 21 to 25 in 1986.[105] One of their conclusions was that illiteracy is not a major problem for the population of 21 to 25 year olds (there are 21 million). It was also concluded that literacy is a major problem. These curious statements alone would make for some debate. This report, by Irwin Kirsh and Ann Jungeblut, claims if one looks at the most basic reading skills, America ranks among the most literate nations. But when it comes to thinking skills, such as abstract reasoning and problem-solving, then performance levels drop.[106]

Other findings:

1. In the 1990s there will be a less literate pool of young adults to meet human resource needs.

2. There is no single measure or specific point on a scale that seperates the literate from the illiterate.

3. Ninety-five percent of young American adults can read at a fourth grade level.

4. Twenty percent of young American adults cannot perform beyond eighth grade norms.[107]

In the forward to this report on young adults, Thomas G. Sticht said, "We should as a nation celebrate literate America."[108] Jonathan Kozol with some consternation believes there is nothing to celebrate in regard to this literacy report. He had this to say: "Lost in a thicket of statistical verbosity and graphs that only the bold or hyperactive dared penetrate were truly disturbing disclosures."[109]

1. Forty percent of adults cannot make use of a road map.

2. Eighty percent cannot calculate a tip in a restaurant or figure out which bus will get them home by using a schedule.

3. Thirty-six million adults cannot read at an eighth grade level.

4. Seventy million adults cannot read at an 11th grade level.[110]

Kozol said that extravagant claims for literacy in this country amounts to jingoistic foolishness that pampers our ego and betrays our national self-interest. Here are some perturbing facts he presents:

1. The United States is 24th worldwide in book sales.
2. Newspaper sales per thousand residents provide this comparison: United States 269, West Germany 408, and Japan 575.
3. The number of cities in this country with competing daily newspapers has declined from 181 to 30 since 1947. Fifty-four daily newspapers have gone out of business in the past nine years (since 1979).[111]

Kozol concludes: "As we honor the bicentennial of the Constitution, few will wish to celebrate the fact, embedded in the new report, that 70 million voters cannot read it."[112]

One implication from reports that attempt to measure literacy is that literacy definitions cannot account for variations of skills needed to function at different levels of society. Being able to read, as an example, does not mean one can successfully use a bus schedule. Another implication from Federal commissioned studies is that little significance is being applied to important institutional indicators of reading behavior. It does not seem logical to celebrate a literate America when our book sales rank us 24th in the world, and our newspapers are going out of business at what seems to be an alarming rate. Perhaps future studies could do some thoughtful analysis of these negative aspects. A study of literacy trends should include structural changes in the way a society behaves and demonstrates its literate ability. How we express our literate potential is at least as important as knowing what percentage can read.

Implications of teaching literacy in many Third World countries

sometimes calls attention to social, political, and economic power. As an example, Paolo Freire, a well-known and controversial teacher of literacy in his native Brazil, was exiled from his country for sixteen years following a 1964 coup d'etat.[113] Freire considers his literacy work as an education for freedom rather than an education for domestication.[114] "To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques," says Freire.[115] It appears that Maxine Greene and Paolo Freire's approachs are based on literacy as a liberating potential. This is quite different from the notion that illiterates are needed in the labor market, therefore they must be quickly trained to read and write.

As technology widens and becomes complex worldwide, societies are apt to be more closely integrated. Scribner and Cole contend these circumstances regarding technology will increase the variety of literacy practices bringing with them new skills or more complicated versions of old skills.[116] Technology may work to introduce new skills, but political regimes can restrict literacy and freedom. The one advantage South African blacks have to overcome apartheid is their labor resources. When they can effectively control large portions of the economy by withholding their labor, then significant political change may occur. This particular means for change is probably their only recourse. Right now the white South African establishment tightly controls the economic, social, and political activity of blacks. Here is a clear situation where literacy development by blacks has not yet proven to be a liberating experience. There is no cultural literacy bonding black and white societies in South Africa.

Summary

About 60 years ago Will Rogers said, "Everyone is ignorant, only on different subjects."[117] He may not have understood that this folksy quip represents a wealth of twentieth century research on literacy. All well-developed societies have distinct divisions of labor that foster literacy along certain unique patterns. Those who work with their hands may be literate in different ways from those who teach and place considerable value on literature, philosophy, and classical studies. Knowing how to manage for one's self, beyond basic literacy skills such as reading and writing, is a key element. But this is where our implementation of literacy falls short. There is so much work to be done just in getting across basic skills to millions of people that frequently advanced concepts of self-development do not flourish. Even literate professionals are not always the best examples of a reasoned, thoughtful approach to self-enhancement. Our research cannot accurately identify potential beyond certain thresholds of achievement.

When Sylvia Scribner described ideal literacy in our society, she said it is simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self-enhancing.[118] But in any endeavor, the ideal is never achieved when working with the totality of society. One way for our country to improve upon its literacy deficiencies is to recognize and address serious, structural problems. Some obvious shortcomings are: poor teacher preparation, family breakups, perhaps television as a substitute for reading, and growing up in poverty. The United Nation's Experimental World Literacy Program found that victims of illiteracy all over the world are adversely affected by problems that go hand-

in-hand with poverty.[119]

Asking readers to roll up their sleeves and teach nonreaders how to read, does not address some of these fundamental problems. Working with illiterate, handicapped youngsters or adults is hard work and requires a commitment of resources. It is quite logical to view our youth as a national resource that must be taught to be literate just as we spend lavishly and sometimes foolishly on military hardware. Recent national spending priorities have not reflected a sympathetic position in regard to promoting literacy. A heavy competition for resources is part of the problem. But in a democratic society, voting age citizens must understand they can make a difference. In other words a free society that is not too interested in literacy problems will continue to be confronted with these problems.

At the level of cultural literacy advocated by E. D. Hirsch, there seems to be one missing ingredient; it is purpose. Individuals who can be identified as being culturally literate have a responsibility to earnestly promote their culture and develop good citizenship. In the 17th and 18th centuries the motive for mass education was to make good citizens. Yet being literate is no guarantee of also being honest, trustworthy or dependable. Hedrich Smith, the well-known New York Times reporter, has identified the Watergate scandal as the epicenter of a political earthquake.[120] This distressing political earthquake was created by literate professionals at the highest level of government. Perhaps, as Maxine Greene observes, there is a desire to buy from colleges and universities what is necessary to get ahead in the world. For some, being literate may be just a mere ingredient

along the career path to wealth and power. Eric Hoffer, while in retirement, confidently said, "It has been my impression that the unlearned can read the book of the world better than the learned."[121]

If everyone in the world were literate using one definition or another, problems of greed, narrow-mindedness, and ego would not be eradicated. Perhaps the literate are more fulfilled in some ways than illiterate citizens, but this is a relative consideration. Just as literacy itself amy be a relative state. Beyond knowing the basics of literacy, there is an unknown process within each individual that works to promote self-development, inquiry, and openness of expression. Probably strong family support at an early age will help to strengthen this self-development process.

Being illiterate and in poverty is like being locked in a cell. This can result in anger, aggression, and various forms of deviate behavior. Enlightened citizens will never make much progress in resolving the illiteracy problem until a serious commitment of resources is made. In this country we have high expectations for our illiterate citizens, but the necessary support to attain literacy is often missing.

Americans frequently have trouble knowing their own mind, and the various images of literacy illustrate this problem. While the general concept of literacy wins universal approval, the debate rages in regard to specifics. As a nation that enjoys setting high standards for others, we should carefully examine our internal literacy commitment. Being a wealthy, free, and spirited society, we can afford to invest more in human resources. Although prominent scholars, such as David Harman, claim we do not have a massive adult

literacy problem, we certainly have room to improve.[122]

If our sophisticated rhetoric on literacy overshadows our resolve, then we will be an endangered technical society. At that point literacy will be a meaningless concept, and technical form will dominate human resource initiatives. It will be difficult to maintain a truly literate nation and continue with narrow technical objectives such as nuclear weapons superiority.

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